The Italo-Abyssinian War faced the Government with, a serious dilemma. Its natural impulse was to react to it as to Japan's invasion of Manchuria; to exhibit a dignified but tepid disapproval, and to let events take their course, afterwards dealing with the resultant situation as seemed best at the time. Against this, was the enthusiasm of a large and important section of the electorate for the League and its Covenant. 'The League of Nations is the keystone of our foreign policy,' Mr. Baldwin had said and often repeated, thereby ensuring the support of many voters who might otherwise have turned away their faces from him, If the League was the keystone of our foreign policy, then, clearly, some attempt must be made to demonstrate its efficacy in preventing one League member from forcibly taking possession of the territory of another; if an embroilment with Italy was to be avoided, then, equally clearly, Mussolini's designs on Abyssinia must not be seriously impeded. It was another case for a doctor's mandate.

As Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon had not enhanced his reputation. The post was a difficult one, and grew ever more difficult as European tension increased. Sir Austen Chamberlain had cracked under the strain, and resigned, recovering to fill the less exacting role of an Elder Statesman; to the last delivering solemn pronouncements upon public affairs, and when he died in 1937, respectfully mourned as 'one who had achieved pre-eminence in recent years among those Elder Statesmen, ever required, and ever ready to give the fruits of their great experience in their country's service.' No breakdown terminated

Sir John Simon's occupancy of the Foreign Office; still sound in body and in mind, he moved unwillingly across to the Home Office. The difficult task of, at the same time, making the League the keystone of our foreign policy and neglecting to fulfil the obligations assumed by signatories of the Covenant whenever fulfilling them might exacerbate relations with other Powers, required someone more supple and dexterous than he. Sir Samuel Hoare seemed a suitable choice; as he had succeeded in framing an Indian Constitution which purported to satisfy Indian